

I Claim

1. A method of generating an indicium for printing on an item including the steps of storing a key; generating a modified key from the stored key in dependence upon first data to be included in said indicia; utilising the modified key in conjunction with second data to be included in the indicia to generate an authentication code and printing the indicium, said indicium including said first and second data and said authentication code.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the first data comprises at least one check digit generated from postal data to be included in the printed indicium.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the first data is the same as the second data.
4. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the first data is the same as the second data.
5. A method of authenticating an indicium including data and an authentication code for authentication of said data includes the steps of selecting a stored key; utilising said data to generate a modified key from said stored key; utilising said modified key and said data to generate an authentication code and comparing the generated authentication code with the authentication code included in the indicium.
6. A method as claimed in claim 5 wherein the indicium includes an identification and a database stores a plurality of identifications and keys corresponding to said identifications and including the steps of reading the identification from the indicium and utilising the read identification to select the key corresponding to the read identification.

7. Postage meter apparatus including means storing a secret key; input means for the input of postage data; electronic control means operative to read the secret key and to modify the secret key to generate a modified secret
5 key in dependence upon and the postage data, said electronic control means being operative to utilise the modified secret key to generate an authentication code dependent upon the postage data and being operative to print an indicium containing the postage data and the
10 authentication code.

8. A postage meter including a first register storing a value of postage dispensed by the postage meter in a predetermined period and generation means to generate a
15 control value dependent upon the value stored in said first register and to include a code value dependent upon the control value in an indicium printed on a mail item.

9. A postage meter as claimed in claim 8 wherein the
20 first register stores a value of postage dispensed in an expired period preceding a current period and including a second register storing a value of postage dispensed by the postage meter in a current unexpired period.

25 10. A postage meter as claimed in claim 9 including a credit register storing a value of credit; and wherein the generation means is operative to generate a control value dependent upon the value stored in the first register of postage dispensed in the determined period and the value
30 of credit stored in the credit register; and means operative to include a code value dependent upon said control value in an indicium printed on a mail item.